

SEAFOOD 101

Give your customer a fish, and she'll eat a day. Teach your customer how to cook fish, and she'll buy from you forever.

Seafood cooking classes are gaining traction in the U.K., and rest certain you'll see more spring to life in North America.

The reason is simple: Teach consumers more about seafood, and they'll buy more seafood.

It's an equation that's worked for the Padstow Seafood School in Cornwall, England.

The school offers a number of courses, ranging from one day to six terms, including Original Fish and Shellfish Cookery, French Fish Cookery, and Classic Seafood Dishes.

The school sends all students home with a folder stuffed with recipes, as well as ingredient and fish information so they can recreate the dishes they have made.

Nick Nairn Cook School in central Scotland teaches a range of techniques in its seafood cooking classes, from initial sourcing and buying of the product to preparing: skinning, filleting, and pin-boning, plus shucking scallops and oysters or preparing and cooking live lobsters.

The holidays are coming: To tap into the gift market, consider selling certificates good for courses at a local — or your very own — cooking school.

Students are also taught how best to store and keep fish.

"Classes dispel the myth that fish is difficult to cook and work with," said spokeswoman Molly Hawkins, "and students discover their own inner talents and feel a lot more comfortable in sourcing, preparing, and cooking seafood."

Padstow's courses attract a variety of students, said a spokeswoman for the school. "People who have no idea how to cook fish and people who are already qualified and want to learn more. They're aged 18 to well into their 70s, and many of them get these courses as gifts."


The classes don't come cheap. One-day classes at Padstow cost £175 (\$355), while six days will set you back £2,250 (\$4,567), including lodging.

But will courses such as these mean more fish on household dining tables?

"One of the main barriers to seafood purchases is the uncertainty as to whether [a consumer] can cook it properly," said Laura Fleming, a spokeswoman for the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute in Juneau. "Most people feel more certain when buying other proteins ... so educating people on how to prepare seafood is a major positive step for boosting sales."

"I would imagine that those who have completed such a course ... increase their fish purchases," said David Basset of the British Trout Association.

"It is our experience that the U.K. consumer lacks confidence in the preparation and cooking of fish and shellfish. Certainly with regard to trout, we have noted a change in the market over the past 20 years from whole trout (with head and bones) to fillets, processed product, prepared ready meals, etc. This is a general trend across the 'Western' market as the average consumer's 'cooking' skills decrease and reliance on pre-prepared meals and convenience food increases."

If you know of a cooking school — or if you operate one — let us know. We're preparing a guide at no charge for you. Contact us at editor@wildcatchmagazine.com. 



Students find fun as well as facts at seafood cooking schools like this one, the Padstow Seafood School in Cornwall, United Kingdom.



At this school in Cornwall, students eat their test results.